

Water Supply and Sanitation Policy issues by ธนยศัฒน์ ปังเส็ง

Understanding the policy issues other countries have to manage with regards to their water and sanitation (WASH) will further strengthen the US presence in discussions in policy challenges and proposed changes with other ministers. Low and middle-income countries face a number of ongoing public health crises (such as high child mortality rates) and development challenges (such as lowered quality of life due to access to essential life needs) because of their poor states on WASH. Some policy issues worth noting include: (1) Supply streams are rampant with corruption and high costs; (2) Household demands for water is inelastic and is effected by poor sanitation practices; and, (3) Climate change is creating many challenges in bringing improved circumstances to millions worldwide.

Firstly, wherever WASH-related issues exist, corruption will absolutely be involved in the complication of providing better supply options for people. In less economically prosperous countries, this can be detrimental to households because it ultimately creates higher end-user costs that are difficult to pay. Corruption in the water-supply system, in particular, makes water access a complicated process with several middle-men involved in making profit from supplies, further driving up costs. Making these processes more streamlined are further complicated by government corruption and changing of hands to maintain the complex web of water suppliers.

Improved sanitation facilities are difficult to supply because of corruption, as well. Particularly in rural areas, where open defecation is widespread, infrastructure is extremely poor and officials are not incentivized to push forward improvements, such as paved roads and waste treatment. These important, basic aspects necessary to support waste treatment services and the delivery of improved sanitation resources thwart development efforts. Those unable to afford stand-alone improved sanitation facilities have few options outside of open defecation, which in turn can make potable water supplies unusable and hazardous to health.



Secondly, the demand for water remains inelastic for households, regardless of income or location. The higher prices caused by the difficult supply systems make survival incredibly difficult for those especially below the poverty line; either households must find a way to pay the exorbitant prices and sacrifice other essential consumables, or resort to potentially contaminated water sources. While development agencies and organizations have worked hard on eliminating open defecation and providing clean water options to communities in these countries (focusing primarily on African and South Asia), results have been mixed in effectiveness and sustainability because of social/cultural contexts, as well as accountability and ownership struggles.

Finally, It is important to note that climate change is constantly changing the conversation about improving WASH access globally on a daily basis. Higher temperatures in areas most struggling with WASH issues create droughts, thus making water access more difficult to manage for countries. Changing weather and more extreme weather conditions, like tsunamis and flooding in tropical areas make water contamination even more frequent and causing problems for large numbers of citizens. This, ultimately, makes costs for water and access to sanitation more cumbersome and difficult for communities and countries to bear.